

## Terms care and assistance in the titles of the theses in nursing (1993-2011)

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Guimarães, F. R. F., Oliveira, D. R. S. d., Velasque, L. d. S., & Amorim, W. M. d. (2013). Terms care and assistance in the titles of the theses in nursing (1993-2011). *Revista de Pesquisa: Cuidado é Fundamental Online*, 5(4), 431-439.  
<https://doi.org/10.9789/2175-5361.2013v5n4p431>

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## RESEARCH

## TERMS CARE AND ASSISTANCE IN THE TITLES OF THE THESES IN NURSING (1963-2011)

## TERMOS CUIDADO E ASSISTÊNCIA NOS TÍTULOS DAS TESES EM ENFERMAGEM (1963-2011)

## LAS EXPRESIONES DE CUIDADO Y ASISTENCIA EN LOS TÍTULOS DE LAS TESIS EN ENFERMERÍA (1963 -2011)

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Analyzing the frequency of application of the expressions “care” and “assistance” in the titles of theses produced by nurses in Nursing area and related fields. **Method:** The quantitative method was used under the perspective of serial history, whose development was supported by the documentary observation. The information was transferred from the Excel spreadsheet to statistical software. For information analysis, we compared the relative frequencies (proportions) of the expressions “care” and “assistance” contained in the titles of the theses. These procedures were performed using the chi-square test, considering a significance level ( $\alpha$ ) equal to 5%. **Results:** Showed that of 1865 thesis, the term “care” and its variations were identified in 230 titles (12.3%), while the term “assistance” in theses 117 (6.3%). **Conclusion:** The overcoming of the term “care” in comparison with the term “assistance” imposes a reflection from their meanings in the application of these terms. **Descriptors:** Nursing care, Assistance, History of nursing, Education in nursing.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Analisar a frequência de aplicação dos termos “cuidado” e “assistência” nos títulos das teses produzidas por enfermeiros (as) na Enfermagem e áreas afins. **Método:** Quantitativo na perspectiva da história serial, cujo desenvolvimento apoiou-se na observação documental. As informações foram transferidas de uma planilha de Excel para o programa estatístico - SPSS STATISTICS. Para análise das informações, foram realizadas comparações das frequências relativas (proporções) dos termos “cuidado” e “assistência” contidos nos títulos das teses. Tais procedimentos foram realizados por meio do teste Qui-quadrado, considerando um nível de significância ( $\alpha$ ) igual a 5%. **Resultados:** Mostraram que de 1865 teses, identificaram-se o termo “cuidado” e suas variações em 230 títulos (12,3%), enquanto que o termo “assistência” em 117 teses (6,3%). **Conclusão:** A superação do termo “cuidado” sobre o termo “assistência” impõe uma reflexão a partir de seus significados na aplicação desses referidos termos. **Descritores:** Cuidados de enfermagem, Assistência, História da enfermagem, Educação em enfermagem.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Analizar la frecuencia de aplicación de los términos “cuidado” y “asistencia” en los títulos de las tesis producidas por los enfermeros en las áreas de enfermería y afines. **Método:** Cuantitativo, historia serial, observación documental. La información se transfiere de una hoja de cálculo Excel para el software estadístico. Para el análisis de la información, se hicieron comparaciones de las frecuencias relativas (proporciones) de los términos “cuidado” y “asistencia” que figura en los títulos de las tesis. Estos procedimientos se realizaron con la prueba de chi-cuadrado, considerando un nivel de significación ( $\alpha$ ) igual al 5%. **Resultados:** Mostraron que la tesis de 1865, el término “cuidado” y sus variaciones se identificaron en 230 títulos (12,3%), mientras que el término “asistencia” en las tesis de 117 (6,3%). **Conclusión:** La superación de la expresión “cuidado” sobre el término “asistencia” impone una reflexión a partir de sus significados. **Descriptores:** Atención de enfermería, Atención, Historia de la enfermería, Educación en enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

The central areas regarding public policies, health, epidemiology, sociology, philosophy and economics, among others, have tried to deal with the complexity concerning care. Whoever interested in investigating this concept taking into consideration the number of articles and academic conferences, also articles in the popular and general Press, will be driven by attempts to quantify and define care.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, in this investigation operated by the historical method, the transitive verb “tell” adopted, at least, two of its almost twenty meanings attributed by the Portuguese language. The first use expresses quantity; the second one is about narrating a fact, both taken from the book which has the vernacular competence to list the definitions of the words and their meanings.<sup>2</sup>

One corroborates with the assumption that the knowledge about the theses elaboration enables the acquisition of subsidies to establish policies for PhD. Programs, contributing to the advance of scientific and technological development of health and Nursing areas.<sup>3</sup>

A great deal of researches has focused on theses elaboration.<sup>3-7</sup> However, the investigations concentrated the analyses, preferentially, on the abstract content, available in the main banks of theses. This investigation also made use of this strategy to get to the title, one of the abstract elements; the one which designates the beginning of the thesis.

Thus, the application of the terms “care” and “assistance” and their variations in the titles of the theses on Nursing registered and shared at the Center of Studies and Researches on Nursing in R. pesq.: cuid. fundam. online 2013. out./dez. 5(4):431-39

the Brazilian Nursing Association between 1963 and 2011.

The use of the terms, care and assistance, together with the word Nursing, has been employed in Brazil in technical and scientific texts.

In a study regarding the analysis of dissertations and theses of Nursing on mental health in Brazil, between 1979 and 2007, one can notice in its discussion the applicability of both terms meaning that the theme nursing care on mental health was inserted in the abstracts of dissertations and theses which presented aspects related to the Nursing assistance.<sup>5</sup>

The legislation of the Professional exercise also makes use of the terms Nursing assistance and Nursing care, sometimes under the assistance perspective, applied eleven times associated with the prescription of providing; executing tasks; prevention of damage to the patient; planning, organization, coordination, execution and evaluation of services; sometimes in the light of care, applied seven times associated with critically ill patient, pre and post operative period, more complex technique, providing, hygiene, comfort, pregnant, parturition, puerperal and newborn.

Throughout the 80’s and the 90’s, the understanding of these terms was based on the conception that nursing care is a planned or automatic action, which results from observation, perception, behavioral analysis and the human being’s situation, whereas assistance is the use of the nursing process seeking to meet the basic humans’ needs.<sup>8</sup>

In this moment, the restlessness which boosts this phase of the investigation about the

applicability of terms assistance and care in the titles of theses on nursing, does not seek to identify the meanings that the authors have attributed to them in the elaboration context, but compare the use of these two terms in a historical series in the temporality between 1963 and 2011, not excluding the pioneer productions which precede the PhD. Programs in the Brazilian nursing field.

Thereby, we consider crucial to operate this thematic by means of the following objective: analyzing the frequency of the use concerning the term “care” and “assistance” in the titles of theses produced by nurses in the nursing and related fields.

This investigation contributes to the characterization of rhythm differences regarding the use of two fundamental concepts in the Brazilian nursing, which refers to the epistemological pole of the professional and technological knowledge of the scientific productions in the country.

METHODOLOGY

It is a study in which the quantitative method was used under the perspective of the serial history, whose development found support in the documental observation.

The temporal series or serial history approach themes present in sources with a certain level of homogeneity, since they allow us to show the behavior of a fact or phenomenon throughout the time, or rather, to serialize the information presented in the documents with the intent of identifying regularities.<sup>9-10</sup>

In this study concerning the titles of theses on nursing registered at the Center of Studies and Researches on Nursing, the application of the terms “care” and “assistance” constitutes the object of the serial observation and became the preferential occurrence of the study.

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The periodization of the historical series regards the year of 1963, date of the first thesis on nursing defended by Professor Glete de Alcântara at the University of São Paulo; this thesis was in the first catalog shared in 1979.

Having as the final milestone the year of 2011, date in which the last CEPEn catalog was shared, available at the time of this investigation in PDF in the website of the Brazilian Nursing Association (ABEn), in way that the series temporality corresponded to forty eight years, dealing with a total of a thousand, six hundred and seventy three theses submitted to analysis. (N=n).

Founded in 1971, the CEPEn is the collection with the biggest theses and dissertation Banks on Nursing in Brazil, it belongs to the Brazilian Nursing Association, which is aimed at boosting the release of research on nursing, organize and preserve the historical documents, according to the provisions of the ABEn statute and the CEPEn regiment.<sup>10</sup>

The documental observation is an analysis technique applied to the study of documents in their different supports, seeking to obtain an observation based on the reality.<sup>11</sup> In this study the documents were the theses and dissertation catalogs published and shared by the Center of Studies and Researches of Nursing (CEPEn) of ABEn, located in the Nursing school libraries in Rio de Janeiro, in the library of ABEn-RJ and in PDF format available at the ABEn national website.

The source is up to the researcher; he selects and organizes the data following his interests.<sup>11</sup>The titles of theses produced in the nursing and related fields constitute the source of this study.

It is worth highlighting that the sources used in the serial history are adjusted in numerical structures (economical indexes, prices, electoral outcomes) and not according to the perspective in which “the historian uses the quantitative

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method, through a double substitution procedure; it is necessary to attribute a single meaning to them related to the issue mentioned but also capable of organizing them in series, or rather, comparable chronological unities”.<sup>12</sup>

In order to collect data an Excel spreadsheet was developed from July to October of 2010. The spreadsheet contains the following categories: year, state, city, institution, theses (Doctorate or free courses), the terms care and assistance in the titles of the theses. To help the analysis, absolute values (0 or 1) were attributed; ‘0’ indicated the absence and ‘1’ the presence regarding one of the terms. As the need to update the study was detected, the year of 2011 was added, considering the data collected in September of 2012.

This way, it was possible to operationalise data, transferring them to the statistical software - SPSS STATISTICS (version 17). Using this software, we initially elaborated some questions which lead us to the identification regarding the theses production between 1963 and 2011. Through the graphs built in the computer program, it was possible to determine the frequency the terms “care” and “assistance” and also its connections, what supported the definition of phases (I and II). The definition criterion of these phases was the prevailing scenario concerning the preference for a term over the other.

The first phase regards the period between 1963 and 1996; the second one covers the period from 1997 to 2011.

In relation to the data analyses, the relative frequency (proportions) of the terms “care and “assistance” were compared. In order to verify the regularity of these terms in the titles, the proportion of care and assistance in the first and second phase was checked, later the occurrence of each term was analyzed between the phases. Such procedures were accomplished by means of a

chi-square test, taking into consideration the significance level ( $\alpha$ ) equal to 5%.

To this analyses, the statistical software R (2.14 version) was used.

The interpretation of the data will be done through the outcome triangulation with the historiography of the Nursing history, care, health and the theoretical Nursing standards.

Since, it is a study based on the analyses of public domain documents, not related to the experience with human beings, this research does not comply with the Resolution 196/1996 of the Health Ministry, for submission purposes to the Ethical Committee.

However, this investigation integrates the institutional research “Care history in the micro and macromolecular aspects: practices, knowledge and institutions”, registered at the Research Department of the Post -Graduation and Research Pro-Rector of the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, under the code **0038/2011-DPq/UNIRIO** developed at the Scientific Approach on Nursing History Laboratory - LACENF (Directory of Research groups - CNPq).

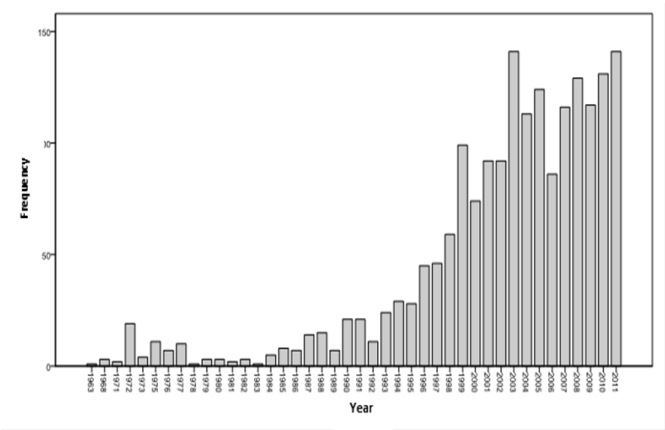
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the period between 1963 and 2011, a total of 1865 theses were produced by Brazilian nurses in the Stricto Sensu Post-graduation Programs of national and international universities. From this total, the occurrence of the term “care” and its variations was identified in 230 titles (12, 3%) whereas; the term “assistance” was present in 117 theses (6, 3%). Only in four of them, both terms were used in the same title.

In Picture 1, we highlight the year of 1963, date of the first thesis produced by Dr. Glete de Alcântara, which delimits the beginning of this modality of scientific production in the Brazilian nursing field. After a pause of 5 years, the elaboration of nursing theses starts again.

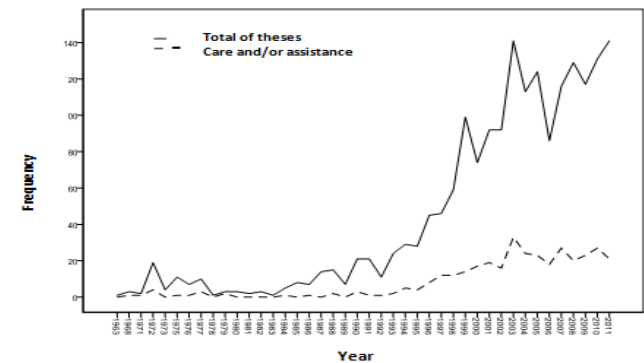


So, one can ascertain that the theses distribution, in the studied period expresses two distinct phases in the graphical representation, the first covers the years from 1963 to 1996 which is characterized by the quantitative regularity of theses production; and the second covers the period between 1997 and 2011, which shows the evidence of a growth regarding theses production, with a significative feature concerning the year of 2003, in which 141 theses were defended, representing 8,4% of 1.865 theses.



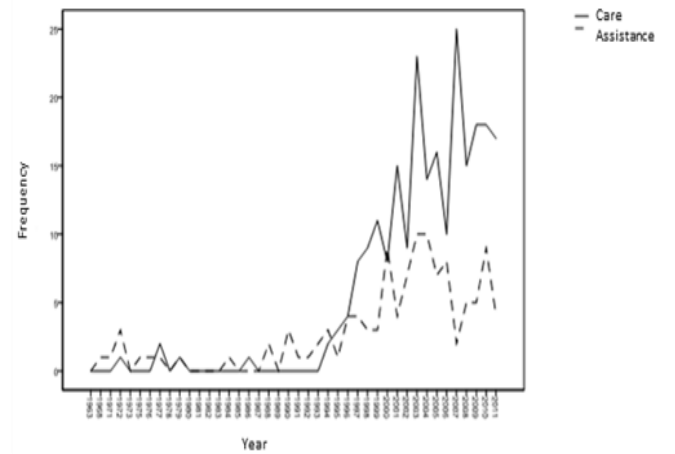
Picture 1- Absolute frequency of the theses defended by nurses in Nursing and related areas at National and International Universities from 1963 to 2011.

In Picture 2, the 1<sup>st</sup> phase concerns 305 theses, in which only 41(13, 4%) made use of the terms “care” and/or “assistance” in the titles. The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase presented an increase in the theses with 1560 theses, one can see that 306 (19, 6%) applied the terms “care” and/or “assistance”. However, the second group replaced the use of the terms in the titles proportionally, in relation to the total theses production in the first phase.



Picture 2- Absolute frequency regarding the use of the terms “care” and/or “assistance” in the titles of theses on Nursing and related areas defended at National or International Universities from 1963 to 2011.

From Picture 3 on, concerning the distribution curves of the use of “care” and “assistance”, one can see that the first phase follows certain regularity; however the term assistance occurs more frequently. In the second phase, one can identify the predominance of “care” over “assistance”. Through these statistical tests in which the incidence of the terms “care” and “assistance” was compared in the first phase, one can observe that in the first phase the proportion of “care” was 4,5% ; while “assistance” was 8,8% (p- value < 0,009). In the second phase the proportion of term “care” was 13%; whereas “assistance” was 5, 7% (p-value< 0,001). Concerning the analyses of each term between the phases, we identified that the proportion of the term “care” was different in both phases, 4,5% and 13%, respectively (p-value <0,001). The term “assistance” presented no significative difference regarding its use in these two phases, 8, 8% e 5, 7% respectively (p-value= 1, 83<sup>-5</sup>), although a decrease in its use can be noticed in the second phase.



Picture 3- Absolute frequency regarding the use of the terms “care” and/or “assistance” in the titles of theses on Nursing and related areas defended at National or International Universities from 1963 to 2011.

The first phase (1963-1996) characterized in this investigation showed two crucial periods concerning the development of the Brazilian Nursing, from the historical milestone of the first thesis elaboration until the first PhD. Program in a

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Post-graduation in Nursing in 1981. Both facts took place at USP and sustained in a balanced way the theses production on Nursing until the second doctorate course was developed at UFRJ in 1992.

A study on the use of the terms “care” and “assistance” in the titles of the theses and dissertations presented in the period from 1984 to 1994, the predominance of the term “assistance” over “care”, such phenomenon was justified by the contribution and use of the publication “Nursing Process” by the nurse Wanda de Aguiar Horta, Titular Professor of the University of São Paulo.<sup>13</sup> In this writing the concept of assistance is defined as the application of the nursing process by the nurse, containing a set of care tasks seeking to meet the human beings’ basic needs.<sup>8</sup>

From 1997, the initial milestone of the second phase, one can see a substantial growth of theses production, resulting from the national policy of post-graduation implemented by the Coordination for Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), which stimulated the increase of Programs regarding diverse knowledge areas, meaning to meet the demands concerning the educational and scientific and technological development field in the country.<sup>4</sup>

Another factor which boosted the increase in nursing theses was the restructuring process initiated in 1997, resulting from the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (1996), which determined that at least one third of the teaching staff should own the Master’s or Doctor’s titles, also one should take into consideration the expansion policy context regarding higher education; in the nursing field it represented an increase in higher education courses embodying a set of 153 courses at the end of the 90’s, reaching a number of 655 in 2007, what corresponded to a 300% increase.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the increase in the use of the term “care” in the titles of the theses in the R. pesq.: cuid. fundam. online 2013. out./dez. 5(4):431-39

second phase, such fact can be explained by the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the concept. The nursing care can be considered a phenomenon already internalized by the authors, during a certain period its meaning was not promoted, evaluated or examined in the professional practice. However, one can identify nowadays, literature that analyzes phenomena underlying to care covering human groups (children, adolescents, adults, women, elderly, etc) described through the experiences acquired by nurses and clients. The term “care” has semantic dimensions, demanding innovation, evolution and/or methodological and technological revolutions in the professional practice.<sup>6, 15</sup> Thus, while widening the range of use of the term “care” one can see, in this phase, by means of the titles of the theses that this fact determined to some extent the higher frequency in which the term “care” was used rather than “assistance”.

In Brazil, concerning the nurse qualifying policy, one can highlight the National Curricular Guidelines of the Graduation Course in Nursing<sup>16</sup>, even being applied in a wider sense, the term “care” indicates competencies and specific abilities; the term “assistance” is kept, sometimes associated to “care”, sometimes embodying the term “care” in the description of the Nursing science, which is defined as the essential activities regarding this knowledge: nursing fundamentals, nursing assistance; nursing administration and nursing teaching. In contrast, the *International Council of Nurses* (ICN) defines nursing as:

Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities sick or well and in all settings. Nursing includes the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health systems

management, and education are also key nursing roles.<sup>17</sup>

One can grasp from this definition that nursing covers both autonomous nursing care and collaborative to individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or healthy, in all contexts. Under this perspective, the term “care” is the essential element regarding the definition of the know-how related to the profession.

Furthermore, as crucial roles one can say the promotion of a safe environment, the research, participation of health policies, health and education system management in nursing. Such point of view already imposes a revisitation in the characterization of the term nursing science in the National Curricular Guidelines for Nursing.

Having the research as essential element of the nursing science, one can state that its use will deliver more credibility to the professional as a specialist in the nursing care.<sup>6</sup> For which, it corroborates with the assumption that the term nursing care is grasped as epistemological pole regarding the nursing interest areas of knowledge.

Moreover, since it is understood as a professional matter, nursing deals with and seeks issues related to taking care and teaching how to take care of people and human groups in situations of the health area, raising epistemological questions about the nurse performance in the scope of nursing as social practice.<sup>18-19</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

In relation to the historicity of nursing theses, in a period covering 48 years, one realizes that the Center of studies and research in Nursing, from the Brazilian Nursing Association was built as a fundamental base to this investigation, which has as its main collection-patrimony in the diverse dimensions of knowledge concerning the Brazilian nursing, and also its availability at the association website.  
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By means of applying the serial historical approach, the relation between the most significant scientific production in the nursing field (thesis) and the applicability of a term which was closer to the relevant activities of this profession (nursing care) was shown and confirmed the assumption of being understood as an epistemic pole concerning the nursing knowledge.

In relation to the fact that the term “care” was used more often than “assistance” in the titles of the theses, one can infer that a reflection is imposed to the nursing studies, based on their meanings regarding the use of these terms, whereas the use of the term nursing assistance related to the systematization of the practical part of the profession and the transversality of the term nursing care in its application while performing, planning and in the health policy, in its dimensions regarding the individual, the family, community and environment, probably, influenced in such a substantial way the referred predominance.

This study suggests an investigative line to the nursing area, using a bibliometric approach. In the theses in which the term “assistance” and/or “care” was used in order to identify the influence level of understanding concerning these terms in the writing “Nursing Process” by the nurse Wanda de Aguiar Horta to clarify the possible relations between nursing care and assistance.

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**Received on: 30/10/2012**

**Required for review: No**

**Approved on: 10/05/2013**

**Published on: 01/10/2013**